**Moscow State University**

Report:

British home vs. Russian home

 

Olga Barsukova

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**Introduction**

There are great amount of homes in Britain — big homes and small homes, old cottages and new buildings, houses and flats. Many British people love old houses and these are often more expensive than modern ones. They also love gardening and you will see gardens everywhere you go: in towns, villages and out in the country. Some are very small with just one tree and a few flowers. Others are enormous with plenty of flowers and enough vegetables and fruit trees.

Two third of the families in Britain own their houses. Millions of these houses are the same with two or three bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs, dining-room and kitchen downstairs. To pay for their house, home owners borrow money from a "building society" and pay back a little every month. It is often very difficult for young people to find a home when they want to start a family.

In Russia, the houses are very varied. Nowadays preserved ancient manors are monuments of architecture of the XIX and even XVIII century. Of course, now they are not used for housing, but they are museums. In Moscow, for example, you can meet absolutely any building: as one-storey historic buildings in the city centre, and five-storey houses of the middle of the last century, more modern nine-twelve-eighteen-storey buildings, as well as skyscrapers in the business center of the capital. It is also worth noting that each era brought with it its own homes. This applies not only to the style and appearance, but also to the technologies of construction: brick houses, cheaper and easier to build block houses, the most modern monolithic houses.

**History of Russian Housing**

An izba is a traditional Russian countryside dwelling. Often a log house, it forms the living quarters of a conventional Russian farmstead. It is generally built close to the road and inside a yard, which also encloses a kitchen garden, hay shed, and barn within a simple woven stick fence. Traditional, old-style izba construction involved the use of simple tools, such as ropes, axes, knives, and spades. Nails were not generally used, as metal was relatively expensive, and neither were saws a common construction tool. Both interior and exterior are of split pine tree trunks, the gap between is traditionally filled with river clay.

The dominant building material of Russian vernacular architecture, and material culture generally, for centuries was wood. Specifically houses were made from locally-cut rough-hewn logs, with little or no stone, metal, or glass. Even churches and urban buildings were primarily wooden until the eighteenth century. All of the building's components were simply cut and fitted together using a hand axe.

From the fifteenth century on, the central element of the interior of izba was the Russian oven, which could occupy up to one quarter of the floorspace in smaller dwellings. Often there were no beds (in the Western sense) for many members of the household, as people would sleep directly on the plaster.

Before the 1917 Revolution 80 percent of the Russian population lived in the country. By the 1980s more than 70 percent resided in big cities like Moscow and Leningrad (St Petersburg). This great influx of people was caused by disruption to everyday life resulting from the Revolution, the devastation of large tracts of the land, a series of failed harvests and the rapid industrialisation of the country. As the influx continued as new factories were built, this caused serious social problems – particularly in the realm of housing.

The Soviet government solved the problem requisitioning houses and capacious apartments of the aristocrats and the wealthy bourgeoisie and dividing them into communal flats (kommunalki).

This was easier to do in Leningrad than in Moscow as there were more buildings and apartments of that sort in the former imperial capital. But requisitioning was only a partial solution and the government was forced to resort to a building programme to overcome the housing crisis. Apart from the barracks for workers adjacent to their factories, the building programme was focused on kommunalki, or communal flats. Between two and seven families typically shared a communal apartment. Each family had its own room, which often served as a living room, dining room, and bedroom for the entire family. All the residents of the entire apartment shared the use of the hallways, kitchen (commonly known as the "communal kitchen"), bathroom and telephone. The communal apartment became the predominant form of housing in the USSR for generations, and examples still exist in some districts of large Russian cities.

After Stalin’s death there was a mini thaw, and the government allowed a more liberal approach to the housing problem by building 5-storey buildings with self-contained apartments in the outer parts of the city. The flats in these buildings, popularly known as khrushchevki, were eagerly sought after. The building faults caused by hasty construction and the absence of lifts were more than compensated for by the sheer pleasure of not having to share.

During the period between the Revolution and the collapse of the USSR in 1991 certain members of the elite in the political, military and cultural world were allocated comfortable, if not luxurious, flats.

Khrushchyovka is a unofficial name of type of low-cost, concrete-paneled or brick three- to five-storied apartment building which was developed in the USSR during the early 1960s, during the time its namesake Nikita Khrushchev directed the Soviet government. **These apartments were planned for small families, but in reality it was not unusual for three generations of people to live together in two-room apartments. Some apartments had a "luxurious" storage room. In practice, it often served as another bedroom, without windows or ventilation.**

**The 1975 Soviet comedy movie “Irony of Fate or Enjoy Your Bath” (directed by Eldar Ryazanov) satirizes the "cookie-cutter" architectural method: it shows a Moscow-dweller flown by mistake to Leningrad; the taxicab drives him to his home street address (which happens to exist in Leningrad as well), and the building and the apartment—and even the key to the apartment—are exactly the same as his own.**

No review of the Soviet housing scene would be complete without reference to the dacha – the place in the country so dear to the Russian town dweller.

The word dacha is derived from the verb 'dat’ meaning to give, and dates from the time of Peter the Great, who granted plots of land near his capital to his subjects for horticultural development and the building of small wooden houses for summer use.

The land belonged to the state but the houses on them to the recipients – a principle that continued to be observed in the Soviet Union. The houses were simple in construction and without the amenities of electricity and water. Thus they were only suitable for summer use and not an alternative source of accommodation. At best, they could be considered as allotments with houses attached.

Dachas are becoming more sophisticated in terms of amenities and provision of space. Some can now be described as fully fledged country houses. A tax is still levied on the land occupied by dachas, and fees are charged to meet the costs of access and general maintenance of the dacha sites.

Since the collapse of the USSR the government has encouraged the privatisation of state-owned blocks of apartments and the building of new private houses and flats. The new deal has also encouraged the completion and sale of multi-family apartments of the Soviet period and the development and marketing of single-family accommodation on the urban fringe.  
Companies set up to effect the new policy arrange financing from private sources such as payments from home buyers, loans from banks and market the newly constructed dwellings. The overriding control is exercised by municipal centres (also responsible for organising access roads and utility connections). Although a large number of private properties are assigned to municipal centres for distribution among buyers, many are sold direct to developers’ employees, suppliers and city officials at a discount. Although privatisation has brought significant improvements to the lifestyle of most home dwellers in Moscow, the cost of desirable property is often unacceptably high.

**History of British Housing**

The Celtic tribes lived in scattered villages. They lived in round houses with thatched roofs of straw or heather. The walls of their houses were made from local material. Houses in the south tended to be made from wattle (woven wood) and daub (straw and mud) as there was an ample supply of wood from the forests. The houses had no windows. 

When the Romans came to Britain they brought their way of life with them**.**The Romans built new towns. These were often protected by walls and there was everything a citizen of Roman Britain would need inside - houses, shops, meeting spaces, workshops, temples and bathhouses.

They also built grand country houses called 'villas'. These had many rooms, some with beautifully painted walls, mosaic floors and even central heating.

*Reconstruction drawing of the front of the villa. by Peter Dunn (2000)*

Anglo Saxon villages were usually very small. SomeSaxons built wooden houses inside the walls of Roman towns. Others cleared spaces in the forest to build villages and make new fields. Some settlements were very small, with just two or three families. In an Anglo-Saxon family, everyone from babies to old people shared a home. Anglo-Saxon houses were built of wood and had thatched roofs. Each family house had one room, with a hearth with a fire for cooking, heating and light. A metal cooking pot hung from a chain above the fire.

The Vikings built their houses from local material such as wood, stone or blocks of turf. They lived in long rectangular houses made with upright timbers (wood). The walls were made of wattle (woven sticks, covered with mud to keep out the wind and rain). Viking houses were often one room homes with a cooking fire in the middle. The smoke escaped through a hole in the roof. Rich people's farmhouses might have a small entrance hall, a large main room, a kitchen, a bedroom and a store room. In a Viking town, houses were crowded close together along narrow streets.

The Normans lived in wattle and daub huts with thatched straw roofs. After invading Britain they also built castles - to defend their new kingdom. Windsor Castle was the first in a series of nine castles that England's King William built around London.  

The Tudor period is the time when the Tudor family came to the throne. Henry VIII is the most famous Tudor king. You can see many Tudor houses in England today. Some of them are over 500 years old. Most ordinary homes in Tudor times were half timbered - they had wooden frames and the spaces between were filled with small sticks and wet clay called wattle and daub. Tudor houses are known for their 'black-and-white' effect.  

After the Great Fire of London in 1666, an act of parliament was passed to ensure new homes were made from fire resistant materials, such as bricks and slate. A typical Georgian house of the eighteenth century was elegant and formal in style. During the Georgian times, there was a heavy tax on windows, as England needed money for war. The number of windows you had was a sign of your wealth - poor people often only had one window per floor. Some people bricked up windows to avoid the tax. Characteristics of Georgian houses: Pillars in the front of the house; Square symmetrical shape; A paneled front door in the centre; Fan light above the door; Paired chimneys; Sash windows (windows which slide up and down); The windows nearer the roof are smaller than the rest.

In the 1850s, the abolition of tax on glass and bricks made these items cheaper yet a suitable material and the coming of the railway allowed them to be manufactured elsewhere, at low cost and to standard sizes and methods, and brought to site. Typical Victorian terraced houses in England, built in brick with slate roofs, stone details and modest decoration. Typical characteristics of Victorian houses: Bay windows (they stick out); Iron Railings; Flemish brick bonding; Patterns in the brickwork made from coloured bricks; Stained glass in doorways and windows; Roofs made of slate; No garage; Sash windows (they open by sliding the window up).

**Modern British and Russian Houses**

England has many types of homes. In the large cities, people often live in apartments, which are called flats. In most towns, there are streets of houses joined together in long rows. They are called terraced houses. The most popular type of home in England is semi-detached (more than 27% of all homes), closely followed by detached then terraced. Almost half of London's households are flats, maisonettes or apartments.

**Terraced House** - One of a row of three or more houses joined together. **Bungalow** - Single storey house.

 

**Detached house** - Not joined to another house. **Semi-detached** - Joined to another house on one side.

 

**Flat** - One of several one-floor homes in one buliding.



More people are buying their own homes than in the past. About two thirds of the people in England and the rest of Britain either own, or are in the process of buying, their own home. Most others live in houses or flats that they rent from a private landlord, the local council, or housing association. People buying their property almost always pay for it with a special loan called a mortgage, which they must repay, with interest, over a long period of time, usually 25 years.

UK homes are some of the most expensive to heat in Europe, which results in high levels of fuel poverty. The problem results from age of the housing stock with most dwellings being built prior to oil shock of 1973, after which insulation standards for newly build housing improved. The UK dwellings have the oldest age profile in the EU with over 60% being built before 1960, and with only just over 10% being built between 1991-2010. The graph above on the history of construction of new dwellings shows this age profile is a consequence of the reduction in the number of in new dwellings build per year after 1979.

In Russian big cities the majority of people in live in blocks of flats the sleeping districts. But here and there are new residential buildings, which have indoor parking, gyms, private security and other benefits.

 

Some people do indeed live at their dachas (and in that case these are more like country houses), but there is no such thing as suburbia in the “American way of thinking”. People do not move to suburbs when they start families and want to raise kids. People want to have an apartment in the city as the permanent home and dacha as a summer-house for weekends. And those people, who do live outside of the city, but work in the center are heavily penalized for the opportunity to have fresh air by sitting in traffic jams on their way to and from work for many hours every day.

There are several types of apartment buildings in Moscow. The least prestigious are 5 store buildings. One level up from “pyatietazhka” is “devyatietazhka” – a nine-storey building, also made of large building blocks. More modern residential housing may have up to 21 floors, but they are also built of panels (the house is assembled quickly, as from Lego blocks). Most people prefer either monolith houses or “Stalin buildings”. New modern buildings are out of the reach of most people, but some of them are nice, have non-standard apartment plans, gyms in the building and indoor garages.

So, 99% of Russians, living in the city do live in apartments. To have a private house within the city limits is super rare. There are just several townhouse communities in Moscow and all of them were established in the recent decade or two.

**Conclusion**

Living conditions in Russia defer greatly depending on the location. While in the cities people live in apartments, in the countryside everyone has a detached Russian house. Of course, a rich family is likely to have a big modern Russian house in a city's downtown (surprisingly enough, it is the most prestigious place to live), but majority of population would not be able to afford such a house. There are mainly 4 types of Russian housing: City Apartment, Communal Apartment, Country House, Dacha

In the last two decades, houses are emerging in Russia, typical for Europe and America: in the suburbs settlements are built, consisting of low-rise buildings, the so-called townhouses.

Today in Russia, as a way of fighting in the economic crisis, there are special economic zones, in particular Skolkovo and Innopolis, whose purpose was research and development, as well as the latest developments in the field of information technology. Innopolis or IT-village is a whole city with administrative buildings of a futuristic look and modern comfortable and beautiful apartment buildings.

The UK has a very high standard of living – it is a very rich country and the people have always enjoyed a comfortable luxury life. 70% of British have their own houses. Only very few people live in flats. Many British people love old houses and these are often more expensive than modern ones. They also love gardening and you will see gardens everywhere you go. There are also mainly 4 types of British housing: City Apartment, Detached, Semi-detached and Terraced House.

More people are buying their own homes than in the past. About two thirds of the people in England and the rest of Britain either own, or are in the process of buying, their own home. Most others live in houses or flats that they rent from a private landlord, the local council, or housing association. People buying their property almost always pay for it with a special loan called a mortgage, which they must repay, with interest, over a long period of time, usually 25 years. We face the same problems in Russian.

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